

26 January 1951

Mr. Joseph Alsop

Dear Joe:

I have enjoyed your hospitality so much and you have been so patient with me in discussion of our differences of opinion that I wish I could accept the point of view expressed in your letter of January 22nd.

I know that responsible newspapermen should be able to secure background facts from governmental officials and I know also that only concrete facts will have impact upon public opinion. Conceding this much, it does not follow that an official of CIA can give out classified information to anyone not authorized to receive it. In many cases, information is classified when it should not be classified but the power of this Agency to correct such mistakes in classification is very limited.

Conceding a little more to your point of view, I believe that at some high level of Government an official should be authorized in his discretion to make certain classified background facts available to responsible newspapermen. I do not think, however, that this authority should ever be given or exercised by this Agency.

Finally, even though I agreed with you entirely, I should not and will not violate a directive from higher authority authorized by an Act of Congress to give me an order. This may sound legalistic, even stuffy, but I am sure that if you were in my place you would take the same position that I have taken.

With best personal regards,

Very sincerely,

W -

WILLIAM H. JACKSON

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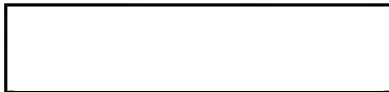
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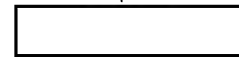
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JOSEPH AND STEWART ALSOP

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Telephone



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January 22, 1951

Dear Bill:

Nothing could have been more agreeable than to have your company at lunch, and since I respect your opinions, I was extremely glad to hear them.

At the risk of seeming ungrateful, however, I think I should lose no time to set the record straight on one point. When I say that responsible newspapermen ought to be able to secure background facts from responsible officials, I mean this absolutely literally. Only facts, hard, concrete facts, have any impact upon public opinion. To try to convince the American newspaper reader of the reality of any situation by stating mere opinion, no matter how high the source, is like trying to nourish a man by feeding him only the gassy part of a loaf of bread.

In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the facts needed to portray any given situation are in the public domain. That they may also be contained quite incidentally in classified documents, does not alter their essentially non-secret character. I only ask officials like yourself about them, because I cannot usually be in enough places at once to gather them myself from non-official sources. The power to act of the American government derives entirely from the people's knowledge of the facts. If the people are uninformed, the government is paralyzed. Thus it is not only the interest, it is also the duty, of men in your position to see that vital facts become known as rapidly as possible.

When an official refuses to discuss situations of great national import in a concrete manner, I bear him no grudge; I merely write him down as one of the very large number whose views are too narrow, or whose experience is too limited, to give him a clear understanding of the machine of which he is a part. By the same token, when an official is willing to talk about background facts sensibly and concretely, I feel no gratitude; he is, in my opinion, merely doing his job, as I am doing mine. At the same time, in this latter case, I do feel a certain obligation with regard to the use of any data that may come my way, which

are within this official's general working purview. This obligation, in brief, is to make sure that I do not use these data in a manner that may be embarrassing to the official. Whether or no the information has actually come from him, he may be asked, "Have you ever talked to Alsop?" And if he must answer, "Yes", his denial of responsibility for the particular publication of facts that has given rise to inquiry, is likely not to prove wholly convincing.

I put all this in writing, because I want to be sure you understand my position. There could never in any case be any question of any deal, or of any "arrangement to cooperate", between you and me. No responsible newspaperman with the faintest respect for his own position would consider anything of that sort. The whole business relationship between official and newspaperman turns upon whether a sense of obligation is created; and this in general depends upon the working of the rules I have set forth above.

Sincerely,

JA:cc

JOSEPH ALSOP

P.S. I drafted this Friday. Since then it was the greatest pleasure to see you and Mary at dinner -- how being engaged becomes you both.

William H. Jackson, Esq.

